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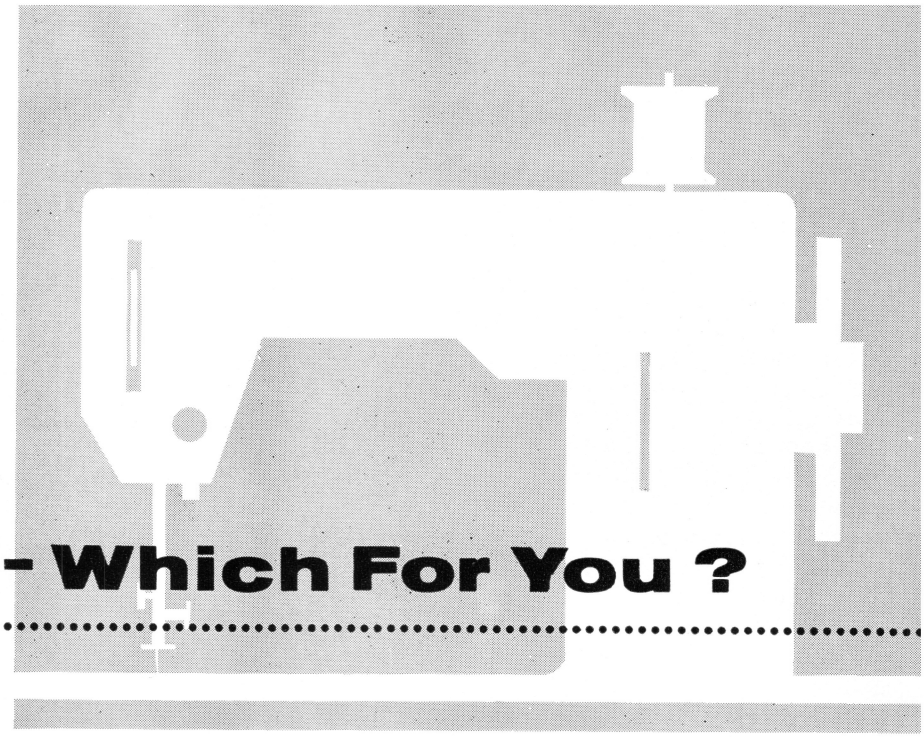

by Helen J. Van Zante

LOOKING FOR a sewing machine? Then you'll need to take a mental world tour before you march into your nearest retail store or mail order house to make your final choice. Geographically, the domestic sewing machine manufacturers of today are located in three places: The United States, Europe and Japan.

American Machines: Let's look first at the sewing machine companies familiar to us within our own country—Singer, White, Domestic, Free Westinghouse, National Sewing Machine Company, Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward.

Of these, Singer manufactures complete sewing machines here as well as abroad. The other American companies may import certain parts of the machine (heads for the machine from Japan, for example). They also may make some single part of the machine, such as the motor. Sears Roebuck lists in its 1961 spring catalog a full rotary jam-proof straight-stitch machine made in the United States. Occasionally American manufacturers who make sewing machines for commercial use also may produce a model for home use.

Singer not only manufactures its machines but also provides a chain of retail outlets and service centers. Its overseas factories plus retail activities on a world-wide scale have contributed to its success. The world-wide market for years kept the Singer company from making any major model changes because replacement parts could thus be kept less expensive. Competition with European machines introduced into the United States after World War II prompted model changes by the company.

In 1900, the Singer Sewing Machine Company introduced sewing machine manufacturing to the Japanese and began building factories in that country. During World War II, the Singer industries were nationalized by Japan. At present, Singer manufactures some machines in Japan, but these machines are not retailed in the United States.

The other well-known companies use a variety of ways to retail their machines: company-owned retail stores, large retail department stores, private dealers and mail order catalogs. Repair and parts replacement for these machines is usually prompt and satisfactory. The geographical source of manufacture of a sewing machine part may be engraved on it. The letters USA appearing on a sewing machine part, or any other appliances for that matter, should have dots between the letters such as U.S.A. Otherwise these letters refer to an area called USA in Japan.

European Machines: Sewing machines made in Europe are precision built and of good-quality steel. Some of the well-known quality European machines are:

Adler—Made in Germany.

Anker and Phoenix — Both made by the same German company.

Angela and Elna — Made in Switzerland by the same company.

Bernina—A Swiss machine.

Borletti—An Italian machine.

Burkopp—Made in Germany. This company makes 300 different varieties of sewing machines mainly for commercial work. The Burkopp is considered the fastest sewing machine ever made (3,000 stitches per minute).

Husqvarna and Viking—Swedish machines made by the same company. Husqvarna is retailed in Europe; the same machine is

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retailed in the United States as the Viking. The Husqvarna Company is noted as one of the largest manufacturers of automatic machines.

Pfaff—Made in Germany. Appeared on the United States market in 1949.

Necchi—An Italian-made machine. Distribution in the United States started in 1949.

Of the European-made sewing machines, the Anker, Elna, Pfaff and Necchi are the most nationally advertised; therefore, they are better known to American women. For this reason, dealers are more willing to sell them, thus causing them to be the most widely sold European machines in America.

Japanese Machines: There are 200 manufacturers of sewing machines or sewing machine parts in Japan at the present time. The brand names given to Japanese machines are very American sounding and, although the number, models and brands are many, the actual number of manufacturers is limited. The *New Japan Sewing Machine News,* December 1960, lists 21 top Japanese manufacturers.

In general, Japanese machines are not made of the quality material that goes into American- or European-made machines. As a whole, however, they seem to sew well, though they are a little noisy at the job.

Some advice concerning Japanese machines comes from the *Nippon Sewing Machine News:* "The importers who choose to purchase cheap sewing machines must observe that the quality deteriorates." This means that in comparing prices of different Japanese machines, the cheapest one is likely to be the poorest in quality. Cost of such machines in general is less than those made here or in Europe.

Here are some special facts about some of the Japanese companies:

Janome—Established in 1921, it is one of the oldest companies in Japan. It recently purchased the New Home Company in the United States.

Toyota—It makes 10 zig-zag machines and exports 7,000 a month to the United States market. It sells sewing machines to the White Sewing Machine Company.

Brother—It sells sewing machines to Firestone and Gamble stores.

Koyo—It produces 9,000 sewing machines monthly and exports 6,000 of them.

Mitsubishi—The monthly production is 10,000, of which 2,000 are exported.

Jaguar—The monthly production is 7,000, of which 6,000 are exported.

Rhythm—It manufactures 4,000 zig-zag machines each month and 6,000 others. Its export average is about 4,000 machines a month.

Fukusuke—It exports 4,000 each month.

Fleetwood—It is the source of ABC machines. Two of the brands that it markets are the New Hope and Fleetwood.

Dragon—This is one of the companies presently selling sewing machines to Sears Roebuck.

Other companies in the top 21 are Cobalt, Liberty, Youth, Riccar, Sanshin and Crosley.

Guide for Shoppers . . .

Study and compare the performance of many sewing machines before you buy. This is easier to do than with almost any other kind of appliance. Try out different machines at home shows, state fair exhibits and stores. Best of all, take the machine to your home for a few days trial.

Which Kind? There are straight stitch and zig-zag machines, second-hand and new ones, cabinet-models and portables. Consider also the source of the machine—American-, European- or Japanese-made models.

If you have a zig-zag machine in mind, there are further choices: (1) the manually operated two-needle position; (2) the manually operated three-needle position; (3) the zig-zag machine having a few cams (discs) and a single needle position; (4) the automatic zig-zag machine (uses cams) with a three-needle position and (5) the fully automatic, which is similar to number 4 except that a reverse cycle is possible for darning and for making certain complex designs such as the Greek key pattern. Sewing machines in this particular class are the Necchi, Elna and Phoenix.

Guide Book and Guarantee? Look for a good instruction booklet. Make sure that the instructions are easy to follow and complete enough for you. Instructions should be clear, concise and complete. The booklet should not be filled with cross references which make you continually refer to other parts of the book.

Read the guarantee or warranty offered with the machine. Don't forget to read the fine print. The 10-year guarantee that might be mentioned by the salesman may be only stated in the fine print and refer to a specific part of the sewing machine. A typical sewing machine guarantee may be for 5 years from the date of purchase and cover all parts — except needles , belts, lamp bulbs and electrical equipment—against defects or breakage resulting from imperfections and manufacture. Electrical parts may be guaranteed for a lesser period, such as 2 years.

Replacements and Service? Check to see whether the replacements will be made free of charge within the guaranteed period. Find out who pays the transportation costs when repairs are needed.

This is the time to find out how long it will take to get a part for replacement. Investigate the reputation and reliability of both the dealer and the available repair service. The likelihood of a dealer remaining in business should also be considered. What provision is there for fulfillment of a guarantee if you move to a new community? Membership of a dealer in the National Sewing Machine Dealer's Association is a clue to servicing and reliability. The dealer should also have a franchise.

Sewing machine dealers, like other appliance dealers, are suffering from high servicing costs. In view of this, it is practical to own a machine which has an easily

removable and fairly portable head. Then you can take it to the service store for better and more satisfactory service.

Test Run the Machine: Try the machine on several representative fabrics that you generally use in sewing. Don't be satisfied with the fabric sample offered by the salesman. When you test the machine's performance on your own fabric samples consider the following:

1. First and foremost look for the machine that produces a good and desirable straight stitch. Avoid a machine that makes staggered stitches or that skips stitches.

2. Observe the stitch after the upper and lower tensions have been properly balanced. Note also the sensitivity of the machine to your own tension adjustments.

3. Observe the ease of threading the upper and lower parts of the machine. Some machines are easier to thread than others. Also see that needle replacement is simple. Check the simplicity and convenience of bobbin winding and the ease of removal and replacement of the bobbin.

4. Note the tendency to threadlock and also any other tendency of the thread to become entangled around the shuttle race or around the shuttle. Remember that full rotary machines do not threadlock as easily. (Turn the hand wheel and see whether the shuttle continues to go "around and around"; if so, the machine is a full rotary.)

5. Notice any "fabric drift," that is where one fabric tends to creep over the other during sewing. Try adjusting the presser foot for different thicknesses of cloth.

6. Notice the ease with which the stitch length can be changed and if there is a clear and understandable indication of different stitch lengths. Is it easy to adjust the presser foot to different thicknesses of cloth?

7. Check to see whether the machine operates in reverse and sews reasonably well over pins.

8. If a zig-zag machine is under consideration, select one that shifts readily and easily from straight stitch to zig-zag and vice versa. Note whether it makes a good smooth satin stitch and also observe the maximum width of the bight. The bight of the zig-zag machine should be wide enough to be adaptable to the distance between the holes on most buttons.

9. On a zig-zag machine, observe the possibility of making good buttonholes. If it's a straight-stitch machine, what sort of attachment is available for making buttonholes, and is it satisfactory?

10. If you want a machine that has darning and mending possibilities, then look for the things that make it possible. They include one or all of the following: presser foot release, feed dog drop and special darning foot. With many machines you can darn just by releasing the presser foot.

11. Look for the presence of a good speed-control device. Operate the machine at the very lowest speed and see whether you're satisfied with its performance. Does the machine start at this low speed without trouble? Observe the speed range and the smoothness of operation when changing the speed. Does speed increase smoothly and gradually or by a step action? Do you like a knee action control or a floor foot control? In either case, how easy is it for you to use your knee or foot on the control and to get the control in place when you are ready to use it? In general, it has been said that cheap machines have a cheap type of speed control.

12. Listen for smoothness of action and quiet operation. A noisy machine sometimes indicates cheaper mechanical construction. Smooth action of the shuttle within the shuttle race and quiet thread take-up are desirable. The shuttle and shuttle race comprise the heart of the sewing machine. If you had only one single drop of oil for oiling, the shuttle race would be the place to put it. This part fills with lint while sewing and needs frequent cleaning. A machine with an oscillating shuttle (one that moves backward and forward when hand wheel is turned) usually is more satisfying if there is a possibility of quick and easy removal of the shuttle from the shuttle race. This would enable you to remove a thread when threadlock occurs.

Although full rotary machines are not so likely to threadlock, it is not practical for you to take care of this matter yourself. This problem calls for a serviceman. (Note: To help prevent threadlock, be sure that the thread take-up lever is at the highest point and that threads are under the foot and to the back of it when you start to sew. Place the needle in the material and holding left forefinger on these two loose threads, take a stitch or two by turning the hand wheel. Now proceed with the sewing by applying the motor power.)

13. Observe the visual effects of the head of the machine. Where is the light placed, and is there glare as a result of the combination of light, color and sheen of the painted finish on the machine head? General attractiveness in over-all appearance is a point to consider, too.

14. Power may be applied from the motor by three types of drives: Friction, belt and gears. Friction drives are more inclined to slip. Gear drives are excellent but are more costly and also more difficult to service.

15. Consider safety points. Could you burn your hand on the light? Is there a UL safety seal for electrical parts? Could the unattached cord be left in the wall outlet in such a way that the plug could electrocute a child who might happen to put it in his mouth? If the plug has prongs rather than receptacles it is dangerous to anyone when the other end of the cord is in an outlet.

16. As previously indicated, size up the possibilities of getting service on your machine. How easily and swiftly could you get new parts? There have been complaints about some makes of machines in that the replacement of parts is extremely slow.

17. The weight of the head, the balance of the lifted head, the accessibility of oil ports are all points to consider in buying. Some machines require the head to be lifted each time the bobbin is to be removed.